

Brief presented by the
Welfare Rights Committee of South-West Montreal
(Comité des droits sociaux du sud-ouest de Montréal)
at the OCPM consultation on the
Project 2175 St-Patrick Project
June 2017

Brief presentation of our organization

The Welfare Rights Committee of South-West Montreal (WRC) is a citizen organisation based in the Point St.Charles district that works for the personal and collective empowerment of people living in poverty through individual and collective advocacy of rights, popular education, organizing and mobilizing.

We work in close association with our French speaking counterpart, the *Comité des sans emploi des Pointe Saint-Charles* (CSE) to provide individuals with information and advocacy services pertaining to welfare issues; as well as a range of activities. WRC and its partner organizations are also pro-active in campaigns and initiatives promoting legislative change and public policies directed at developing social justice and dignity for everyone. Our organization is also a member of several coalitions including Action-Watchdog (*Action-Gardien*), the Point St. Charles coalition of community groups.

While housing issues are not directly at the centre of our mission and activity, they have a major impact on our members, participants and users of our services. This is particularly true of any project or proposition that may impact the availability of social housing units and/or the dynamics of gentrification in the community. This is why we are presenting this contribution to the present consultation, which is based on discussions at our Board, in addition to comments from members and participants of our organization.

On condos and gentrification in general

The growing gentrification of Point St.Charles over the last 10 to 15 years has had a major impact on people with low incomes, which includes welfare recipients and retirees, but also many wage-earners.

The impact is manifold:

- Certain residents have been pushed out of the community by rent increases, repossessions or they were bought-out of their lease (take the money and leave now, or risk leaving with nothing later on);
- Others have kept their apartment but are impoverished further each year by rent increases;
- Thanks to social housing, many have stayed in the community without rent increases. They have kept their home, but feel that they are losing their community as, one by one, they see businesses and restaurants they could afford and where they could meet with their friends disappear;
- Simultaneously, new businesses appear that are completely inaccessible, increasing the resident's feelings of being shut out from everything in their community except their apartment...
- Community groups are the one exception, remaining still accessible as places to gather. But now, even rental spaces for community groups are being jeopardized by the transformations at work in the Point!

Given all this, it is no wonder that our members, participants and people who use our services do not react favourably when they hear about more and more condos coming to the Point.

That being said, it is worth noting that people in our group do not blame condo owners or renters of expensive apartments for the situation. Nobody thinks that buying a home is evil, or that people who live in them are bad. In fact, several of these new residents are active in community groups where their presence has been welcomed by long-time residents.

The problem rather is in the numbers and the unbalance between the development of condos, conversions, expensive rentals (etc.) and units of social housing and (truly) affordable private rental housing. People do not mind having new neighbours with more money, but they do mind losing their apartments or community businesses and services that catered to their needs.

That is why, along with other community groups in the Point, we wholeheartedly agree with the common position developed at Action-Watchdog calling for the following three points: 1) the acquisition by the City of a reserve of lands and buildings to be set aside for social and non-profit housing; 2) maintaining and strengthening the *Accès-Logis* program and 3) a stronger inclusion policy reserving 40% of all residential projects for social and non-profit housing;

WRC's Discussion on the Pros and Cons of the 2175 Project

The reason there is a discussion in the community on this project is obviously because one can find strong arguments both for and against it.

The main arguments in favour are: a) the important percentage of social housing and b) the donation of 3000 sq m of space for community groups.

The main arguments against the project are: a) the impact of yet more condos in the Point and b) the fact that these would be alongside the Lachine Canal.

On the first point, while we and other groups in Action-Watchdog still aim globally for 40% of social and non-profit housing in the community, we must consider the inclusion of 29% of total units in social housing in addition to the 3000 square meters of surface for community groups. This amounts to an considerable level of inclusion, and one that fully warrants our support.

As for the second point, community groups have long opposed the spread of condos along the Canal. The reality however is that nearly all of the south bank between Atwater and Montmorency is now covered with condos leaving the site of the Project as the last lot left to develop¹. Many have shared with us their concern that even without the 2175 Project, other projects might appear years later that would not offer comparable benefits. Whether they are correct or not, it is clear that the development that has already taken hold will not be reversed or fundamentally altered by the fate the 2175 project. On the other hand, if the Project does go ahead, it would stand out as the only one in that sector to offer such major benefits to the community.

WRC's position

All considered, we believe that what could be gained, saved or protected without the 2175 St-Patrick Project is vastly outweighed by the benefits of this project for people in need of social housing and groups in need of space.

We therefore support the 2175 St-Patrick Project and call upon all actors involved to help with its implementation, and to ensure that all terms concerning the share of social housing and community space as well as the protection of public use of the Canal banks are respected.

¹ This all the more reason for the importance put by community groups on protecting the sector east of Montmorency.

